

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT BR
SUBJECT: LOCAL PRESS COMMENT AND EDITORIAL REACTION TO RECESS OF CONGRESS

1. SUMMARY. BRAZILIAN PRESS REACTION TO RECESS OF CONGRESS WAS HEAVILY NEGATIVE. EDITORIALS IN MAJOR PAPERS, WITH EXCEPTION OF PRO-GOVERNMENT O GLOBO, CONDEMNED MEASURE WITH VARYING SEVERITY AND EXPRESSED HOPE THAT PRESIDENT WOULD MAKE PRUDENT USE OF HIS LEGISLATIVE POWERS. LEADING COLUMNS OF OPINION ASSERTED EXISTENCE OF CHRONIC, PERHAPS NOW DEFINITIVE, BREACH BETWEEN THE REVOLUTION AND DEMOCRACY, AND SAW LATEST RESORT TO AUTHORITARISM AS OMINOUS, IF NOT FATAL SIGN, OF LONG TERM PROSPECTS FOR DISTENSAO.

2. SEVERAL WRITERS SAW THE MDB'S FUTURE AS A VIABLE PARTY THREATENED BY IMPENDING REFORMS DESIGNED TO EXCLUDE IT FROM ANY HOPE OF POWER. A NUMBER OF COLUMNISTS INTERPRETED THE HANDLING OF THE JUDICIAL REFORM BILL AS A GOVERNMENT TACTICAL MANUEVER TO FACILITATE A RESOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL REFORMS ISSUE. THE GOVERNMENT'S MODERATION THUS FAR IN HANDLING THE RECESS WAS FREQUENTLY CITED AND ENCOURAGED, AND GENERALLY ASCRIBED TO DESIRES TO MINIMIZE FOREIGN REPERCUSSIONS AND LIMIT DOMESTIC TRAUMA AND INSTITUTIONAL DAMAGE END SUMMARY.
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3. EDITORIAL CRITICISM: INCOMPATIBILITY OF DEMOCRACY AND EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES. PRESS REACTION TO GOVERNMENT'S ACTION IN RECESSING CONGRESS HAS BEEN GENERALLY NEGATIVE. EDITORIALS IN MAJOR PAPERS, WITH EXCEPTION OF PRO-GOVERNMENT O GLOBO, CONDEMNED MEASURE IN VARYING TONES OF SEVERITY. SHARPEST REACTION CAME FROM O ESTADO IN ITS EDITORIAL MARCH 2, WHICH DECLARED

PRESIDENT HAD RECESSED CONGRESS FOR BEHAVING IN ACCORDANCE WITH ITS CONSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES, AND FOUND PARADOXICAL HIS ASSERTION THAT DEMOCRACY EXISTS AT SAME TIME HE RESORTED TO EXCEPTIONAL MEASURE TO RECESS THE MOST TYPICALLY DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTION. HAVING DECLARED DICTATORIAL A MINORITY OF THE OPPOSITION, THOUGH RESPECT FOR MINORITIES IS ESSENTIAL TO DEMOCRACY, THE PRESIDENT FOUND NOTHING DICTATORIAL IN HIS OWN ACTIONS AND APPROACH. O ESTADO CONCLUDES THAT IF AT EVERY OBSTACLE THE GOVERNMENT DEMANDS YET ANOTHER SACRIFICE OF WHAT IS UNDERSTOOD AS DEMOCRATIC, BRAZIL WILL END UP WITH A DEMOCRACY EXOTIC BEYOND RECOGNITION, AND WILL FALL INTO THE DOGMATIC DREAM OF HAVING A DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER AFTER HAVING LOST THE CHARACTER OF THE DEMOCRACY.

4. JORNAL DO BRASIL OPINED MARCH 2 THAT ACT WAS MORALLY A STEP BACKWARD, RAISING THE QUESTION AS TO WHAT TYPE OF REGIME THE COUNTRY CAN HAVE UNDER REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS. DEMOCRACY REQUIRES PARTIES JORNAL RECALLED, AND PARTIES REQUIRE THE ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCES. THE NATION WELCOMES GEISEL'S DETERMINATION TO LIMIT THE SEVERITY AND THE INSTITUTIONAL DAMAGE CAUSED BY THE RECESS, AND TO BE PRUDENT IN HIS REFORMS. HOWEVER, CONCLUDES JORNAL, POLITICAL REFORMS BY FIAT ARE NOT DURABLE, AND IN ANY EVENT, A POOR CHOICE OF THE OPTIONS COULD BE FATAL.

5. FOLHA IN ITS MARCH 2 EDITORIAL ALSO WELCOMED THE NON-PUNITIVE CHARACTER OF THE RECESS, AND EXPRESSED HOPE THAT PRESIDENT WOULD EXERCISE HIS POWERS TO MEET POPULAR ASPIRATIONS BY HARMONIZING THE POLITICAL SYSTEM TO THE EXERCISE OF THE POPULAR PARTY VOTE, ALLOWING FOR ROTATION OF POWER, BY MINIMIZING PARTISANSHIP IN UNCLASSIFIED

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THE REFORMS, AND BY RECOGNIZING THE DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY OF THE EXERCISE OF POWER BY MINORITIES. FOLHA CONCLUDED BY ALERTING THAT PRESIDENT'S MEASURES SHOULD INCLUDE A PROCESS OF LEGITIMATION, SINCE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS MUST BE BROAD AND NON-EXCLUSIONARY POLITICAL AGREEMENTS, IF THEY ARE TO ACHIEVE LEGITIMACY AND DURABILITY. O GLOBO EDITORIAL MARCH 5 BLAMED THE CRISIS ON MDB INTRANSIGENCE, DECLARING THAT MINORITY RIGHTS IN A DEMOCRACY DO NOT INCLUDE RIGHT TO IMPEDE NORMAL FUNCTIONING OF DECISION MECHANISMS. GLOBO DESCRIBED RECESS AS TECHNICAL MEASURE, NOTE-WORTHY FOR THE DISPASSIONATE MODERATION WHICH SURROUNDED IT AND THE OFFICIAL ASSURANCES OF CONTINUED POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT.

6. COMMENT BY POLITICAL COLUMNISTS WAS ALMOST UNIFORMLY CRITICAL OF GOVERNMENT. LEADING PIECES ASSERTED THE EXISTENCE OF A CHRONIC AND PERHAPS NOW DEFINITIVE BREACH BETWEEN THE REVOLUTION AND DEMOCRACY, AND DECLARED THAT LATEST RESORT TO AUTHORITARIANISM IS OMINOUS, IF NOT FATAL, SIGN OF THE LONGER TERM PROSPECTS FOR DISTENSAO.

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7. CARLOS CHAGAS OF O ESTADO DECLARED APRIL 2 THAT GRAVER THAN THE RECESS OF CONGRESS WAS THE HIGH LEVEL TESTIMONY THAT THE REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS CONSTITUTES A PERMANENT RULE, NOT AN EXCEPTION. THUS, DECLARES CHAGAS, THE INCOMPATIBILITY BETWEEN THE REVOLUTION AND DEMOCRACY IS EVIDENT. THE GEISEL REGIME WILL LEAVE AS ITS HISTORICAL LEGACY THE END OF ILLUSIONS (ABOUT DISTENSAO) AND IN SO DOING WILL FACILITATE THE TASK OF ANY HARDLINE SUCCESSORS WHO MAY APPEAR. IN SUBSEQUENT COLUMN, CHAGAS POINTED TO NUMEROUS CONTRADICTIONS IN GEISEL SPEECH, SUCH AS FAULTY LEGALISTIC EXPLANATIONS OF AN EXCEPTIONAL MEASURE, AND CONCLUDED THAT CONCILIATION OF THESE CONTRADICTIONS THROUGH "SEMANTIC ARTIFICES" IS BECOMING IMPOSSIBLE. GREATER REALITY WHICH EMERGES IS THAT REVOLUTION AND DEMOCRACY TODAY ARE UNABLE TO COEXIST. THE SLOW, SURE PROGRESS INVOKED BY THE PRESIDENT IS IN FACT IN AN ANTI-DEMOCRATIC DIRECTION, AND CONCILIATION AND EVOLUTIONARY SOLUTIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE UNTIL THE REVOLUTION CEASES TO BE THE PROCESS WHICH IT HAS BECOME.

8. JORNAL DO BRASIL'S LEAD COLUMNIST, MARCOS SA CORREA, DECLARED APRIL 2 THAT GOVERNMENT HAD CROSSED FRONTIERS OF ABSOLUTISM TO CREATE GEISEL'S POLITICAL MODEL, OFTEN TOUTED BUT NEVER DELINEATED. SA CORREA ADDED SARCASTICALLY THAT PRESIDENT APPARENTLY HAS NEW CONCEPTS BEYOND THOSE OF THE POLITICIANS,
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WHOSE STOCK OF IDEAS IS LIMITED TO THE COMMON HERITAGE OF CIVILIZATION. WHAT WILL EMERGE FROM RECESS IS UNKNOWN, GIVEN CONTRADICTORY EVOLUTION OF A GOVERNMENT WHICH NOW HAS SECURED ITSELF IN A "COCOON OF AUTOCRACY" TO CREATE ITS VERSION OF DEMOCRACY. IF RESULT IS MORE CONSTITUTIONAL PATCHWORK TO CONVERT VOTER APPEALS FOR LIBERALIZATION INTO SECURITY REQUIREMENTS, GEISEL'S POLITICAL PROJECT WILL HAVE SUFFERED ANOTHER SETBACK, AND THERE WILL BE NO ONE IN CONGRESS TO BLAME. IN SUBSEQUENT PIECE, CORREA WARNED THAT GEISEL SHOULD REALIZE MDB IS NOT THE ONLY BODY WHICH HARBORS MINORITIES READY TO IMPLANT THEIR OWN DICTATORIAL MODEL. THERE IS AN AI-5 MINORITY WHICH LIKES TO USE THAT MEASURE, AND HAVING GATHERED UNTO THE EXECUTIVE ALL POWERS, GEISEL IS MORE THAN EVER SUBJECT TO PRESSURES FROM THAT GROUP.

9. O ESTADO'S EVANDRO PARANAGUA DECLARED APRIL 2 THAT LATEST BREACH OF REVOLUTION'S DEMOCRATIC COMMITMENTS, LIKE THE FIRST SETBACK WITH AI-2 IN 1965, WAS BASED ON REVOLUTION'S INABILITY TO ACCEPT PARTIAMENTARY OR ELECTORAL RESULTS CONTRARY TO ITS OWN VISION. WITH EACH SUCCEEDING CRISIS, IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT MDB WAS CREATED MERELY TO PROVIDE SEMBLANCE OF EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION. WHAT IS MORE SERIOUS IS THAT MILITARY, WHICH UNDERPINS THE REVOLUTION, HAS NEVER ADOPTED DISTENSAO WITHIN ITS OWN RANKS, AND IS BECOMING ACCUSTOMED TO AN INTERVENTIONIST ROLE WHICH EXTENDS BEYOND ITS TRADITIONAL PART AS "MODERATOR". INDEED, THE YOUNGER GENERATION OF OFFICERS KNOWS LITTLE ELSE. PARANAGUA CONCLUDES, HOWEVER, THAT THE "CLEAR, IF UNDECLARED" CHOICE OF THE REVOLUTION IS FOR DEMOCRACY "AS A DESSERT OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS," WHICH SUGGESTS THE POSTPONEMENT, RATHER THAN THE JETTISONING, OF THE ORIGINAL DEMOCRATIC COMMITMENTS.

10. ROLE AND FUTURE OF THE MDB: CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT WAS ALSO PREVALENT IN THE MORE NARROWLY ANALYTICAL COLUMNS, THOUGH THE MDB CAME IN FOR A CERTAIN SHARE OF THE BLAME. MANY WRITERS POINTED OUT THAT, IN REJECTING JUDICIAL REFORM, MDB ENGAGED IN LEGITIMATE EXERCISE OF ITS CONGRESSIONAL PREROGATIVES AND THE UNCLASSIFIED

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DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS OF A MINORITY. OFTEN NOTED WAS FACT THAT IN SUPPOSEDLY SETTING ITSELF UP AS "DICTATORIAL MINORITY" MDB WAS AVAILING ITSELF OF CONSTITUTIONAL MEASURES IMPOSED BY THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF IN 1969 FOR ITS OWN PURPOSES.

11. A NUMBER OF COLUMNISTS SAW HANDLING OF JUDICIAL REFORM BILL BY MANY ARENA MEMBERS, IF NOT ALSO THE GOVERNMENT, AS DELIBERATE TACTIC TO RESOLVE QUESTION OF POLITICAL REFORMS. O ESTADO'S VILLAS BOAS CORREA, FOR EXAMPLE, IN APRIL 3 COLUMN DECLARED THAT JUDICIAL REFORM DISPUTE SUCCEEDED IN TRANSFERRING RESOLUTION OF POLITICAL REFORM ISSUE TO TIME AND PLACE OF GOVERNMENT CONVENIENCE. JUDICIAL REFORM BILL, WHICH LAY DORMANT MORE THAN

A YEAR IN MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, ACHIEVED URGENCY ONLY WHEN PRESENTED TO CONGRESS IN SUSPICIOUS COINCIDENCE WITH INITIATION OF INTER-

PARTY SOUNDINGS ON POLITICAL REFORM. IT WAS LATTER ISSUE WHICH RADICALIZED THE SETTING IN WHICH THE "ARTIFICIAL CRISIS " OF THE JUDICIAL REFORM AROSE, AND RESULTED IN THE END OF DISTENSAO. NO DOUBT INTERNAL TUMULT IN MDB CAUSED BY AUTHENTICOS CONTRIBUTED. IN VIEW OF LIKELY IMPOSITION OF POLITICAL REFORMS DESIGNED TO BLOCK MDB ACCESS TO ANY POWER, CONTINUED CORREA, MDB MEMBERS HAVE COME TO DOUBT FUTURE OF A PARTY WHICH HAS LITTLE TO OFFER ITS MEMBERS BUT WORTHLESS LEGISLATIVE MANDATES AND THREAT OF EVENTUAL CASSATION. INDEED, MDB IS SHEDDING ITS FEAR, BECAUSE IT NO LONGER HAS ANYTHING TO LOSE.

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12. O ESTADO COLUMN APRIL 2 PURSUED CONSPIRACY THEME BY DECLARING THAT "MANUFACTURED CRISIS" ATTAINED OUTCOME DESIRED BY RADICALS ON BOTH SIDES, AND THAT JUDICIAL REFORM WAS MANIPULATED AS A PRE-TEXT TO CAST UPON MDB "AUTHENTICOS" THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR EXECUTIVE IMPOSITION OF THE POLITICAL REFORM DESIRED BY GEISEL. CORREIO BRAZILIENSE'S OLIVEIRA BASTOS FAULTED MDB'S AMATEURISH STUPIDITY IN FALLING FOR SUCH A DECOY, BY LEAVING ASIDE THE ESSENTIAL, I.E., THE DEBATE (AND THE CHANCE TO BARGAIN) OVER ALTERNATIONS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, AND INSTEAD INVOKING PARTY DISCIPLINE OVER JUDICIAL REFORM.

13. THEME OF SERIOUS, IF NOT FATAL, CONSEQUENCES FOR MDB RECURRED ELSEWHERE. CORREIO'S MARCONDES SAMPAIO, FOR EXAMPLE, OPINED THAT DISCREET SILENCE MAINTAINED BY INDIVIDUAL MDB LEADERS IS DESIGNED TO AVOID FURTHER RESENTMENT ON PART OF EXECUTIVE AND THEREBY PREVENT, OR AT LEAST POSTPONE, THE MOST DRASTIC REFORM

MEASURES, SUCH AS INDIRECT ELECTIONS, WHICH WOULD BE DEVASTATING TO PARTY IN ITS CURRENT PHASE OF LOCAL REORGANIZATION, AND WOULD RESULT IN MASSIVE DEFECTIONS TO ARENA OUT OF DESPAIR. FOLHA COLUMN APRIL 4 WENT A STEP FURTHER BY SEEING CONGRESS ITSELF AS A FATAL VICTIM, ROBBED OF CREDIBILITY AND FURTHER PREJUDICED IN PUBLIC EYE BY LACK OF SELF-RESPECT ON PART OF A CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP WHICH SUPINELY ACCEPTED THE RECESS. IN DECIDING TO LEGISLATE, EXECUTIVE HAS THUS ASSUMED ANOTHER RES-
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PONSIBILITY: TO PREVENT THE WRECK OF THE PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTION FOR LACK OF PUBLIC ESTEEM. O ESTADO'S CARLOS CHAGAS, ON THE OTHER HAND, MAINTAINED THAT IN ABSENCE OF CASSATIONS, IT WILL NOT BE DIFFICULT FOR POLITICAL CLASS TO ABSORB LATEST TRAUMA, SINCE WITH LOSS OF ANY REMAINING HOPES FOR LIBERALIZING POLITICAL REFORMS, MAIN PROBLEM AND PREOCCUPATION NOW IS NOT THE EXERCISE OF MANDATES, BUT THEIR SIMPLE PRESERVATION. HE ADDED THAT LEGISLATORS GENERALLY HOPE THAT PRESIDENT WILL USE RECESS TO IMPOSE HIS POLITICAL REFORM, SINCE THIS WOULD RELIEVE THE LEGISLATURE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT AND SPARE CONGRESS THE PAIN AND DANGERS OF ANOTHER BRUISING LEGISLATIVE DEBATE.

14. INTEMPERANCE OF ARENA LEADERSHIP AND MDB TACTICAL ERRORS CAME IN FOR CRITICISM. ANALYTICAL PIECE IN JORNAL DO BRASIL APRIL 4, FOR EXAMPLE, POINTED TO ERROS OF INTRANSIGENCE ON BOTH SIDES, ADDING THAT MDB CC CANNOT MORALLY JUSTIFY SUCH INTRANSIGENCE SINCE THE PARTY WAS FAR FROM UNITED IDEOLOGICALLY ON THE JUDICIAL REFORM ISSUE. END RESULT REFLECTED FACT THAT JUDICIAL REFORM WAS INTENDED TO MARK BEGINNING OF NEGOTIATION PROCESS ON POLITICAL REFORM. RECESS, HOWEVER, DOES NOT MARK A COMPLETE COLLAPSE, GIVEN GEISEL'S PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND ABILITY TO OVERCOME CRISES OF THE SORT WHICH STYMIED HIS PREDECESSORS. INDEED, RECESS IS PERHAPS LESS PAINFUL THAN THE DISASTER WHICH WOULD HAVE RESULTED HAD POLITCAL REFORMS BEEN DEBATED WITH EQUAL HEAT. IN END IT MUST BE RECOGNIZED THAT A PRESIDENT CANNOT GOVERN WITHOUT MILITARY SUPPORT, AND CIVILIAN SECTOR OFFERS LITTLE TO SUSTAIN A PRESIDENT WITH HIS OWN WILL. FROM SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT ANGLE, APRIL 3 PIECE IN FOLHA DECLARED THAT GEISEL'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE RECESS ERRED IN BASIC PREMISE, IN THAT JUDICIAL REFORM BILL DID NOT CONFORM TO DESIRES OF JUDICIARY AND EVEN LACKED UNANIMOUS SUPREME COURT SUPPORT. MDB'S ERROR WAS IN ESCHEWING DISCREET NEGOTIATIONS AND OPTING FOR A BEAU GESTE FOR PULIC CONSUMPTION, THUS HELPING PRODUCE SERIOUS, IF NOT FATAL, DEFEAT FOR "DISTENSAO."

15. MOTIVES AND ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT: COLUMN IN O ESTADO
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APRIL 2 DECLARED THAT IN MILITARY (AND INCREASINGLY IN CIVILIAN) CIRCLES, PREVALENT VIEW IS THAT GEISEL'S MOVE ANTICIPATED INTERNAL PRESSURES AND HAS CONTRIBUTED TO CIRCUMSTANCE THAT, UNLIKE HIS PREDECESSORS, HE WILL INFLUENCE AND TO CERTAIN EXTENT ABSORB THE REVOLUTIONARY SYSTEM AS IT PROCEEDS TO SUCCESSION QUESTION. AT SAME TIME, GEISEL HEADED OFF AN IMPASSE ON THE REFORM ISSUE WHICH COULD HAVE RESULTED IN EVEN GREATER DAMAGE TO INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES.

16. GOVERNMENT'S MODERATION IN ITS HANDLING OF THE RECESS WAS COMMONLY ASCRIBED TO DESIRE TO MINIMIZE INTERNATIONAL REPERCUSSIONS (WITH ONE OR TWO WRITERS SPECIFICALLY MENTIONING THE NUCLEAR ACCORD), AND/OR TO MINIMIZE DOMESTIC TRAUMA AND DAMAGE TO INSTITUTIONS. O GLOBO FOR EXAMPLE, IN APRIL 3 COLUMN BY MERVAL PEREIRA FILHO, PORTRAYED AN ATMOSPHERE OF DISPASSIONATE MODERATION SURROUNDING THE DECREE OF RECESS, WHICH WAS SUPPOSEDLY DESIGNED TO MINIMIZE NEGATIVE FOREIGN REACTION. THERE IS LESS GOVERNMENT CONCERN, DECLARED PEREIRA, IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD, WHERE U.S./BRAZIL MUTUAL INTERESTS SHOULD SURVIVE ANY PASSING DIFFICULTIES CREATED BY THE LATEST MOVE. COLUMMIN APRIL 4 FOLHA ASSERTED THAT HIGH ITAMARATY OFFICIALS, NORMALLY UNSEEN IN CONGRESS, LOBBIED HARD FOR A COMPROMISE SOLUTION ON JUDICIAL REFORM BILL, AND ARE NOW CONCERNED WITH FOREIGN REPERCUSSIONS OF THE RECESS, ESPECIALLY FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT.
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